WHAT YOU LEARN FROM GETTING BURNED

Even after he was grown and owned
his own business and a Beech Bonanza,
my father was ashamed of the lunch
he had to take to school when he was
a poor farmboy in Texas. His husky
drawl would go cold and thin as if
he faced a Norther wind when he
told me about his tin lardcan in
which he carried his one cold, day-
old biscuit ladled with bacon fat.
My father never knew about et pa y all,
the hunk of stale bread soaked with
olive oil Pyrenees peasants wrapped
in a rag for their dejeuner; and he
would have thought it silly how city
people search gourmet shops today
for the virginest oil for that repast.
All he knew was that he had to get
away from that farm before he starved;
so he quit his three r's and joined
the Civil Conservation Corps, then
later went to the city where he could
always get a decent meal of store-
bought bread — and plenty of red meat.

GUFF

My father ruined me for other men.
Not because of beatings or beratings,
but because he was so good to my
mother. She didn't think he was
so good, though, and she was always
saving her money so that when he
was bad she could rent an apartment
in Long Beach, pack our things,
and be gone when he got home from work.
She always burned her bridge behind her,
didn't even tell her sisters Lil,
Essie, or Vera where she was going,
gave the landlady and the telephone
company her maiden name, Smith, and
then she and I'd eat chocolate sundaes
and go to the movies until her
savings ran out and she had to
get a waitress job and I had to
go back to school.

My father always found her.
His own shamus Sam Spade, he'd
gumshoe every cafe and drug store
in town, showing people her photos,
the one of her wearing pigtails,
an upsweep with gardenias behind
her ears, until someone identified her
and my father would find her, follow her
home, begging her to listen to him
until she'd say, Ray, don't give me
any more guff, else I'll call the police.
Then he'd lean against the lamppost
outside her apartment, chainsmoking
Lucky Strikes, and calling not Roxanne,
not Stella, but Margaret, Margaret,
until finally she let him in and
he'd kneel beside her feet and weep,
Please come back to me, his tears
streaking and salting up his
wire-rimmed Glenn Miller glasses.

How my father ruined me
for other men.

HEARTTHROBS

My Aunt Louise subscribed to Photoplay,
wrote fan letters, and kept a movie star
scrapbook for so long that she began to
hallucinate. Boldfaced lie, my father said,
but I believed my Aunt Louise's story that
the movie star Richard Egan had fallen
head-over-heels in love with her, drove
all the way from Hollywood to Colton,
California, to meet her Saturday afternoons
at the chili dog stand on Mt. Vernon Boulevard.
Just to hold her hand, nothing else,
my Aunt Louise, only 16, swore to her daddy,
a hot-headed Texas railroad man, who got out
his pistol and cleaned it and loaded it and
tried to sneak up on Richard Egan at the
chili dog stand to catch him in the act
with his little girl. But he always
got there too late, Richard Egan just
having driven away, just moments before,
back to L.A. in his red '54 Coupe de Ville.
Someday, someday, my grandpa would say,
I'm gonna get me that slippery son of a bitch,
and my father would say, Jesus Christ, if this